

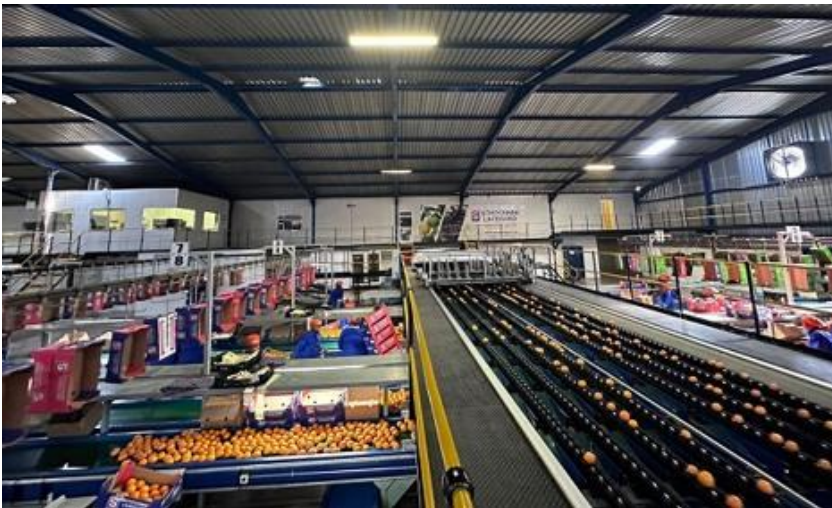
Early spring heatwave and summer hail take away volumes in country's north

Short South African citrus season predicted

Export estimates for various citrus categories have been amended downwards: navels by 500,000 15kg cartons to reach an estimate of 24.8 million 15kg cartons; grapefruit by 100,000 cartons to 14.3 million cartons, over two million fewer than last year.

Initially it was estimated that the Valencia crop would be higher than last year but it, too, has since been decreased by 1.4 million cartons to settle on the current export estimate of just over 53 million 15kg cartons.

Mandarins, on the other hand, is projected to see a small increase of 200,000 cartons, a product of recent buoyant soft citrus expansion, but late mandarins were also affected by the hail in November.



Nadorcotts and Orri being packed at Schoonbee Landgoed in the Loskop Valley of the Senwes area

South Africa is divided into two very distinct rainfall regions, and therefore it is striking to note that during November 2022, the same month in which apple orchards in the winter rainfall area of Ceres were struck by hail, citrus orchards in the north of the country experienced the same.

In the Senwes area (on the border between Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces) older orchards under net were protected from the worst of the hail, says Danny Pienaar of Schoonbee Landgoed, but on one of their outlying farms winds were so severe that the hail net structure was pulled down and, they've accepted, there will be no crop from that block this year.

Right: a Valencia orchard in Senwes after hail in November 2022

But more pernicious was an August heatwave on late citrus varieties in bloom, particularly Valencia types and late mandarins, leading to blossom drop.



Overall, in the Senwes area, Danny says, a 20% reduction in Valencias and late mandarins is expected with a concomitant increase in sizes, which necessitates a rethink of the marketing plan and packaging options.

In Justin Chadwick's latest newsletter, the CEO of the Citrus Growers' Association cites climatic conditions for also reducing the lemon export estimate by 1.6 million cartons.

"Late rains in the north impacted early shipping and fruit drop; rains in the Eastern and Western Cape impacted packing choices between lemons, oranges, and mandarins, while delayed colour development also had an impact," Justin writes.

An exporter tells FreshPlaza: "They're predicting a real early end to the season in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga regions due to low volumes."

The exporter adds that cold stores in Durban have reported less stock moving through their facilities.

Publication date: Tue 4 Jul 2023

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